

A More Difficult Path

Reflections on Mormonism. Edited by Truman G. Madsen. Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Center for Religious Studies, 1978. 222 pp., biblio., indices. \$6.95.

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Perhaps the most significant thing to say about the importance of this published collection of papers read at Brigham Young University in March, 1978, is that it exists. To have eleven scholars renowned in various aspects of religious studies visit the Mormon university and present research in their fields related to Mormon beliefs and traditions is a history-making event. (Twelve were invited, but Ernst Benz was unable to be present because of health problems. Nevertheless, a paper authored by him has been included in the volume.) Not all the participants actually made such a comparison as the title of the book suggests, but the implications for Mormonism are sometimes as significant in those which make little or no mention of Latter-day Saint beliefs as those where overt comparisons or distinctions are suggested.

Truman Madsen, editor of the volume, provides an introductory essay outlining the historical emphasis of Mormonism. As well as that worthwhile addition to the guest papers, Madsen has also written brief introductions to each of the symposium papers. Even if these interpretive paragraphs are necessary, they would have been better joined together at the beginning of the volume, because their present placement just before each essay tends to prejudice the reader's perception of the meaning and significance of the contributions. The editor also should have made it clear that Benz was not present at the symposium and, more

important, he should have noted that the Benz paper was translated from German by a BYU faculty member.

Perhaps the best way to illustrate the value of the collection is to give a brief examination and analysis of a few of the essays. With so little yet published on the astounding archaeological discoveries at Tell Mardikh (Ebla) in Syria, any book with an informative article on that subject is worth possessing. David Noel Freedman is less formal in his paper than many of the other contributors, and the significance of his material for the Abrahamic Tradition in history could be overlooked quite easily by a reader not aware of the Ebla texts. The suggestion by such an eminent scholar that evidence now available compels one to consider the book of Genesis as an historical and not just a mythological work is revolutionary in the world of modern scholarship increasingly skeptical in such matters.

W. D. Davies, displaying a more detailed search into Mormon thought than many of the participants, focuses on Mormonism as it relates to the subject of Israel in history. Consonant with his own predilections about the origins and history of Christianity, Davies interprets Mormonism historically as an American reaction against an overly-Hellenized Christianity (hence the Mormon emphasis on the Israelite roots of Christianity) just as Marxism was a European reaction "against the false spiritualization of a too-much Hellenized Christianity. . . ." Even if the Latter-day Saint is uncomfortable with the comparison between Marxism and Mormonism, he can take solace in the seriousness with which Davies analyzes the points of contact between old Israel and Mormon beliefs.

The difficulty of his task in identifying and comparing Messianic passages in the Pseudepigrapha and the Book of Mormon is admitted by James Charlesworth. He notes that not all agree on what is Messianic in the Pseudepigrapha nor on how